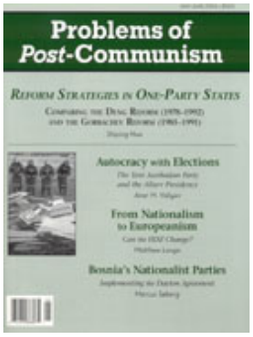

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Problems of Post-Communism

ISSN: 1075-8216 (Print) 1557-783X (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/mppc20

Fascism, Vigilantism, and the State: The Russian National Unity Movement

William D. Jackson

To cite this article: William D. Jackson (1999) Fascism, Vigilantism, and the State: The Russian National Unity Movement, Problems of Post-Communism, 46:1, 34-42, DOI: 10.1080/10758216.1999.11655819

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10758216.1999.11655819

Published online: 28 Jan 2016.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 1

View related articles

Citing articles: 2 View citing articles

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=mppc20

Download by: [Orta Dogu Teknik Universitesi] **Date:** 13 February 2016, At: 11:50

Fascism, Vigilantism, and the State

The Russian National Unity Movement

William D. Jackson

Downloaded by [Orta Dogu Teknik Universitesi] at 11:50 13 February 2016

Militant extremist movements continue to operate in Russia, sometimes with the tacit support of the local, regional, and even the federal government.

In 1996 Russia's Presidential Commission on Human Rights reported that more than ninety radical right-wing groups were active in the Russian Federation. Together they published some 150 periodicals propagating fascism, militant nationalism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism. Extremist organizations and their ideas, the commission warned, had begun to penetrate trade unions, the military, law-enforcement agencies, and institutions of higher education.[1] The commission also warned that the growth of militarized extremist groups, posed an increasingly serious threat to Russia's tenuous democratic order. While militant nationalist groups still operate at the margins of Russian politics, some of their extremist ideas have penetrated mainstream institutions. Some of the groups themselves have found growing political support from official structures, in Moscow and increasingly in Russia's provinces. The fascist-style, paramilitary movement Russian National Unity is a prime example of this trend.

The Rise of Russian National Unity

Russian National Unity (*Russkoe natsional'noe edinstvo*) is the largest of the numerous paramilitary, fascist-style parties and groups to have appeared thus far in Russia. Other ultranationalist parties, such as Vladimir Zhirinovskii's Liberal Democratic Party and Nikolai Lysenko's National Republican Party, have sponsored paramilitary auxiliaries. They have done so more for show than substance. Other ultranationalist political groups, such as the Russian National Union, the National Social Union, and the Russian National Guard (which more closely resembles the RNE in terms of para-

WILLIAM D. JACKSON is professor of political science at Miami University of Ohio.

Problems of Post-Communism, vol. 46, no. 1, January/February 1999, pp. 34–42.
© 1999 M.E. Sharpe, Inc. All rights reserved.
ISSN 1075-8216 / 1999 $9.50 + 0.00.

military style and fascist-like ideology), have remained quite small in terms of their membership and have failed to develop an organizational structure in the provinces. In contrast to these groups, Russian National Unity (RNE), established in fall 1990, has remained a disciplined and semisecretive paramilitary organization with an expanding presence in Russia's provinces.

RNE membership has grown steadily. Although RNE officials claim that by 1998 the movement had more than 150,000 members, estimates by journalists and other observers range from 10,000 to 100,000.[2] While the lower figure, at least for active members, is likely more accurate, RNE membership has increased significantly in recent years. In particular the movement has been active in a growing number of regions, especially in central and southern Russia. The RNE's history testifies both to the continuing attraction of militant extremist movements among embittered and frustrated segments of Russian society and to a disturbing tendency among elements in the Russian government and military to support anti-democratic movements.

The RNE's history testifies both to the continuing attraction of militant extremist movements among embittered and frustrated segments of Russian society and to a disturbing tendency among elements in the Russian government and military to support anti-democratic movements.

Aleksandr Barkashov has led the RNE since its inception. Born in 1953, Barkashov comes from a working-class background. He failed to complete his secondary education and worked as an electrician before entering politics. Barkashov also served in a special-forces unit in the Soviet army. He began his political career as a member of the Russian nationalist society Pamyat in the mid-1980s. By that time, Pamyat, under the leadershhip of Dmitrii Vasiliev, had embraced an increasingly chauvinist, praetorian, and anti-Semitic ideology. In 1987, Barkashov was elected to the Pamyat Central Council. The ultranationalist, anti-Semitic, and fascist political views that characterize his RNE speeches and writings resemble closely those espoused by Vasiliev in the late 1980s. The three years that Barkashov served as a member of the Pamyat Council likely influenced his subsequent political thinking.

By 1990, Barkashov and a small group of supporters had concluded that Vasiliev's loosely organized Pamyat did not suit their ambitions in the new era of Russian multi-party politics. Unlike the Liberal Democratic Party, the National Republican Party, and other ultranationalist parties that formed in this period, however, the RNE under Barkashov's leadership took the form of paramilitary, semi-secret order rather than an orthodox political party.

Aleksander Barkashov, leader of the Russian National Unity (RNE) movement, addressed the conference marking the fifth anniversary of the movement. Representatives of the twenty Russian cities with RNE branches took part in the conference. (ITAR-TASS)

The RNE has a rigid castelike structure. Members and followers are divided into four categories: chief comrades-in-arms (*glavnye soratniki*), comrades-in-arms (*soratniki*), supporters (*spodvizhniki*), and sympathizers (*sochustvoushchie*). Comrades-in-arms are required to swear an oath to a code of honor stipulating their obligations to defend the Russian (*russkii*) nation and to undergo special military training. RNE members are divided into groups of approximately fifteen to twenty, with each group commanded by a chief comrade-in-arms. Members are required to wear uniforms and observe military-style discipline, including the use of fascist-style salutes. Their political education is based largely on Barkashov's writings.

Downloaded by [Orta Dogu Teknik Universitesi] at 11:50 13 February 2016

Echoes of the Third Reich

In addition to Barkashov's writings and interviews, the movement's newspapers, *Russkii poriadok* (Russian Order) and *Russkii stiag* (Russian Banner), present RNE ideology. Resembling traditional fascist, particularly Nazi, ideology, the RNE agenda almost entirely lacks the populist character of Zhirinovskii and his Liberal Democratic Party. The RNE program calls for the establishment of a greater Russian state encompassing the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Belarus, within which ethnic-Russian rule will be assured. The current democratic order in Russia is castigated as being a tool of a Jewish international-financial oligarchy dedicated to humiliating and crushing the Russian nation.[3]

RNE publications assert that a Russia dominated by ethnic Russians has a mission to establish the world supremacy of the Russian state.

The RNE program calls for the establishment of an authoritarian, dictatorial order in Russia that has grim parallels to the Third Reich. The Greater Russian state would guarantee the national purity and political supremacy of ethnic Russians. A national dictatorship would be established to preside over a national council (*sobor*) in which various groups (labor, the intelligentsia, industrial managers, etc.) would have corporate representation.[4] By law, ethnic Russians would be represented in the National Council in a proportion equal to no less than that of their share of the overall population—about 70 percent according to Barkashov.[5]

The national government would ensure the subordination of all individual and minority interests to the needs of the Russian nation. This overarching objective of state policy would require, *inter alia*: prohibiting mixed marriages and protecting the "genetic purity (*geneticheskaia chistota*) of the Russian Nation";[6] confining non-Slavic peoples to "historic homelands," and enforcing policies designed to ensure that the population growth rate of ethnic Russians remains greater than that of non-Russian minorities. The Russian state would be organized into traditional *gubernii*a—a position that Barkashov shares with Zhirinovskii—and no autonomous territorial formations would be permitted. Barkashov's writings and RNE publications call for drastic action against Russia's enemies, principally Jews. Barkashov's primer declares, for example, that because the Russian people have been the victims of genocidal policies applied on a vast scale in the twentieth century, "the answering measures adopted by the Russian state must be corresponding in their character and scale."[7]

The national dictatorship envisioned by the RNE would also ensure that ethnic Russians were proportionally represented in all key institutions and professions. In particular, the Jewish-dominated state intelligentsia is to be "replaced" (*zameniat'*) by an intelligentsia composed of ethnic Russians. Beyond recreating a Greater Russia, RNE publications assert that a Russia dominated by ethnic Russians has a mission to establish the world supremacy of the Russian state. The United States is described as the current "base camp" of a Jewish international-financial oligarchy that has persistently aimed to destroy Russia. The Bolsheviks, Gorbachev and his allies, and the contemporary Russian democrats are all seen as instruments by which this Jewish oligarchy would crush the Russian nation.[8]

Other aspects of RNE ideology, particularly its militancy and insistence on the subordination of the individual to the interests of the nation, are reflected in the code of honor to which comrades-in-arms swear allegiance.

RNE ideology, like that of the Nazis, attaches great importance to the occult and to mystical symbology. Worn as a shoulder patch on the uniform of comrades-in-arms, the Party symbol is the left swastika or Kolovrat. In an effort to establish a Russian pedigree for the symbol, party publications declare that it was worn by the legendary Russian knight Evpatii Kolovrat and subsequently displayed by medieval Russian armies in battle. RNE members believe the Kolovrat swastika has special powers. Party publications declare:

> The Left-Swastika signifies to Russians the presence and protection of God in battles with enemies, and appears as a fundamental symbol opposing the principal symbol of the Judeo-Masonic five-pointed star. . . . Visually it acts on the subconscious of occultists and theomachists, paralyzes, weakens, and demoralizes them.[9]

The swastika is also proclaimed to confer special powers on the wearer. It "acts on the brain [of the wearer] and through it on the subconscious, arousing archetypes or genotypes of the ethnic Russian, and gives him powerful internal strength."[10] The special powers of the swastika are believed to be especially effective on the of impressionable consciousness of youth.

Barkashov has declared that the Russian people will rise and assert themselves when archetypal memories of an idealized ancient Russia are reawakened. Although

Downloaded by [Orta Dogu Teknik Universitesi] at 11:50 13 February 2016

he has generally been vague on the timing of such a nationalist revolution, Barkashov demonstrated his own readiness to appeal to beliefs in the occult. He once told *Zavtra,* the militant nationalist newspaper, that the year 1994 was likely to be decisive in the struggle "between the forces of Good and Evil" because in that year Orthodox Easter coincided with Walpurgis Night, a time "when all the most powerful and occult forces are at work."[11]

More recently, official Party doctrine has described the most likely form of the national revolution that would bring the RNE to power. Comparing contemporary Russia to Weimar Germany, an infirm Yeltsin, like the senile President Hindenberg in 1933, would be forced by popular will and political circumstance to invite the RNE to take over leadership of the government.[12] Barkashov's decision to endorse Yeltsin in the 1996 presidential election was justified in terms of this scenario. RNE publications cite the fact that local RNE organizations have been authorized to act as auxiliaries aiding in the maintenance of public order in some districts and regions—discussed below—as evidence of the first steps in realizing this strategy.

Isolated and Marginalized

Because of the RNE's overt embrace of fascist themes, other nationalist–patriotic parties have tended to avoid embracing it. These groups either reject such ideology in principle or find public association with overtly fascist-style groups politically inexpedient. The Russian Communist Party, its new willingness to associate with nationalist forces notwithstanding, has also rejected the RNE as a fascist organization. At communist rallies I observed in 1993 and again in 1995, the communists greeted uniformed RNE members serving as self-appointed militia auxiliaries with chants of "*Vlasovtsy*"—the epithet reserved for Soviet POWs who fought for Hitler.

Barkashov and the RNE did achieve a more positive image in some quarters of the nationalist movement as a result of their role during Yeltsin's October 1993 confrontation with the Duma. Barkashov and approximately 100 RNE members formed the core of the armed defenders of the Russian White House and the alternative government under Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi. Barkashov was subsequently arrested, imprisoned, and then amnestied, along with other rebel leaders, by the new Duma in early 1994. Although *Zavtra* hailed Barkashov as a patriotic hero, other nationalist patriotic parties remained distant as they sought to cultivate a more sophisticated image after 1993.

Russian National Unity (RNE) Movement Code of Honor

Nothing is above the Nation. The Nation is above all.

A Comrade-in-Arms is obligated to restore justice to the Russian (*Russkii*) people by his own power and weapons (*svoei vlast' iu i svoim oruzhiem*).

A pursuit of the foreign and external enemies of the Russian Nation, however far beyond the borders of the Russian Nation they may be, is an affair of honor for the Comrade-in-Arms.

A Comrade-in-Arms is obligated to remember that Russia has no friends. He who forgets this becomes a traitor.

The RNE's relative isolation within the national–patriotic camp also reflected Barkashov's attempt to define the RNE as the only true Russian nationalist movement. Barkashov has contemptuously characterized other nationalist leaders as "opportunists" with roots in the old communist *nomenklatura*. In the RNE world view the party elite were complicit in the genocide against ethnic Russians.[13] Although the RNE was among the parties associated with Aleksandr Sterligov's Russian National Assembly, a 1992 attempt to unite emerging nationalist parties, Barkashov subsequently denounced the National Assembly for connections to the old Soviet nomenklatura and ended RNE participation. RNE publications have described Zhirinovskii as an ersatz nationalist of Jewish origin, engaged in a secret campaign to discredit Russian nationalism and consolidate the power of Western financial circles and their Russian henchmen over Russia.[14] Barkashov's aversion to cooperation with other right-wing nationalist parties provoked one of his deputies into resigning from the party, citing Barkashov's "determination to revive Nazi traditions" as a factor limiting the movement.[15]

Barkashov's estrangement from both mainstream patriotic–nationalist groups and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation was further indicated by his declaration of support for Yeltsin in the 1996 presidential election. By 1996, however, the RNE had begun to bill itself as the "strategic reserve" of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, or MVD, and some of its local detachments had gained semi-official status as voluntary militia (*druzhinniki*) authorized to conduct patrols to maintain local order.

In an attempt to build grass-roots support for an RNE-led national revolution, the RNE has sought to recruit new members from labor unions, students, Cossack communities, and the armed forces. In March 1994, Barkashov signed a "declaration," on behalf of the RNE, with the chair of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions, Aleksandr Alekseev. The document proclaimed the two

Downloaded by [Orta Dogu Teknik Universitesi] at 11:50 13 February 2016

groups' intention to form a national-socialist movement based on "the Russian idea" that would work toward establishing a state in which the interests of Russian (*russkii*) labor would take priority. That same year, RNE members took an active role in supporting a strike called by a local branch of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions at the Cherepovets Steel Mill in Vologda province. Although the RNE hoped that worker discontent would take a militant turn, there has been little sign that its strategy has been successful. While worker unrest in Russia remains high, workers have shown little disposition to move beyond strike threats and strikes to the militant insurgency advocated by the RNE. Should such conditions develop, the RNE could benefit. In southern Russia, most notably Krasnodar krai, the RNE has developed a close working relationship with the revived Cossack movement. Barkashov himself has been named an honorary Cossack by the regional Cossack Council.

While worker unrest in Russia remains high, workers have shown little disposition to move beyond strike threats and strikes to the militant insurgency advocated by the RNE.

While the RNE remains confined to the margins of Russian national politics, it has continued to make disturbing progress in increasing its membership, especially among youth and veterans, and extending its organizational base. By the fall of 1997, RNE activity was reported in fifty-three regions. In some regions, local RNE organizations have established military–patriotic clubs aimed at indoctrinating youth with the RNE's version of national–patriotic values. This aspect of RNE activity has appeared to gain the approval and support of some military officials. In Tver the RNE has sponsored a youth club that searches for the remains of Russian soldiers killed during World War II and conducts ceremonial services that have received favorable coverage by the media.[16] At the national level, the RNE has established a military–patriotic society, Kolovrat, to serve as an umbrella organization for local and regional military patriotic clubs.[17]

Regional and Local Ties

Some local and regional authorities have cooperated with local RNE organizations. Certain military units have also supported RNE programs. Most disturbing, given the RNE's overtly fascist character, federal authorities have quietly acquiesced in these activities. In its official literature and street handbills, the RNE boasts that it has a special relationship with the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and many local governments. The RNE newspaper, *Russkii stiag*, declared in 1995:

> The authority of the regional detachments of the RNE has grown immeasurably (*neizmerimo*): In many regions fighters of the RNE uphold order on the streets at the request of the MVD and actively cooperate with [local] executive authorities in the resolution of various local problems and certain political situations in the region.[18]

In some regions, local RNE detachments have functioned as police auxiliaries with the blessings of local authorities. In Kostromo, a local RNE chapter was formed in December 1995 under the leadership of two retired Army colonels, Andrei Timofeev and Vitalii Berezhny. In April 1996, the mayor issued an executive order authorizing the establishment of a volunteer detachment to maintain law and order (*pravoporiadok*). Acting under the mayor's order, the local RNE formed a detachment of "volunteers" from their own ranks and began to patrol the city's central market. The unit reportedly concentrated on harassing non-Russian merchants. In addition to beatings and threats, the local RNE unit demanded regular payments from non-Russian merchants for the "right to breath Russian air."[19] Although the detachment was subsequently disbanded because of repeated complaints of brutality, the local RNE chapter has continued to enjoy support from the local administration. Several local officials were "special guests" at a regional RNE conference held in Kostromo municipal facilities in April 1998.[20]

Local authorities in the Terletsky district in Moscow have similarly permitted the local RNE chapter to function as a police auxiliary. Not surprisingly, a similar pattern of harassment of ethnic minorities has followed.[21] RNE detachments have also been active in conducting "patrols" on commuter trains in the Moscow region, although to what extent these patrols have the support of the authorities is not clear.[22] Reports suggest a similar pattern of activities by local RNE units acting ostensibly as auxiliaries of the militia in Voronezh, Stavropol, and Krasnodar krai.[23] In Voronezh, local authorities allowed the local RNE chapter to establish its headquarters in a municipal building and to conduct press conferences in the building of the regional Duma. The local RNE leadership has claimed to have fifty thousand members and twenty-four chapters across the Voronezh

Downloaded by [Orta Dogu Teknik Universitesi] at 11:50 13 February 2016

oblast. This claim almost certainly exaggerates the organization's true membership, as RNE leaders have been regularly inclined to do. Local reports generally indicate an upsurge in RNE activity in the province, however. Apparently encouraged by some growth in support, the RNE has fielded candidates in local and regional elections since 1995, but without success.

Reports on RNE activity in other regions indicate that the RNE has made considerable progress in recruiting members and extending its organizational base. The RNE has been especially successful in southern Russia, where hostility toward ethnic minorities has surged in reaction to the war in Chechnya. In Stavropol krai, the RNE has established a training center, which operates with the support of local police and military authorities.[24] The RNE held a conference for the "southern region" in a Stavropol municipal facility in August 1998. The conference was attended by more than 500 representatives of local and regional RNE groups.[25]

In neighboring Krasnodar krai, the RNE has joined with resurgent Cossack organizations to operate with the open support of the province's self-declared national–patriot governor, Nikolai Kondratenko. Kondratenko, a communist elected in December 1996, has regularly engaged in crude rhetorical attacks on "cosmopolitan" forces alleged to be waging all-out war against the Russian nation—attacks echoing those made by the RNE. At the same time, he has courted and supported the revival of Cossack organizations in the province and encouraged Cossack and RNE vigilante activities against ethnic minorities. Shortly after his election, Kondratenko appointed Vladimir Gromov, the hetman (chief) of the All-Kuban Cossack Host, to the post of deputy governor and issued a decree placing the province's Cossack organization under the direct control of regional authorities.[26]

Within the province, detachments of Cossack and RNE militants have maintained road check points and conducted sweeps of local markets intended to intimidate and harass Meskhetian Turks and other ethnic minorities. The encouragement that Kondratenko's administration has appeared to give to subsequent intimidation and harassment has led human-rights advocate Sergei Kovalev to charge Kondratenko with introducing a policy of official racism in the province.

Not surprisingly, the conditions in Krasnodar krai have provided fertile soil for the growth of the RNE. At the RNE congress in February 1997, the regional representative from Krasnodar krai boasted that the RNE had established cells and youth clubs in every town and village in the province. In nearby Orel province, the RNE and its local leadership have received at least tacit support from provincial authorities.[27] The head of the provincial RNE organization, Egor Semenov, actively supported Egor Stroev in his successful campaign for the provincial governorship in 1993. Subsequently, the RNE-supported League of Orthodox Youth was allowed to operate in municipal facilities and the regional paper *Orlovskaia pravda* has provided regular and favorable coverage to the League's "patriotic" educational activities.[28] When Semenov and several other RNE members were charged in a murder-conspiracy case in 1997, *Orlovskaia pravda* published a series of articles that portrayed them as innocent, maligned patriots harassed by anti-patriotic elements.[29]

In addition to beatings and threats, the local RNE unit demanded regular payments from non-Russian merchants for the "right to breath Russian air."

The RNE's sponsorship of the League of Orthodox Youth reflects a broader RNE strategy to present itself as a defender of the Russian Orthodox religion and culture. Orthodox symbology has been increasingly prominent at RNE meetings, and Orthodox priests have been among the invited guests at RNE conferences. Recent reports have indicated that RNE organizations in some regions have developed working relations with, and received a degree of support from, Orthodox church officials. In Kaluga province, the RNE has been active in guarding churches and in keeping order on feast days. RNE detachments have performed similar functions at some churches in Moscow. The Volgograd RNE organization has reportedly been permitted to set up its headquarters on church property.[30]

The Russian Government and the RNE

As has been the case regarding most militant right-wing groups, Yeltsin government has failed to take effective action to repress the RNE or at least to curtail its activities. This may indicate either the political weakness of Russia's "super-presidential" system or the active connivance of elements within the government sympathetic to the ideologies or activities of these groups, or both. The mainstream press has regularly emphasized that the government has the legal authority to take actions against militant fascist groups that seek to incite ethnic hatred or subvert the state.[31] The current Criminal Code of the Russian Federation makes it a crime to actively incite

Downloaded by [Orta Dogu Teknik Universitesi] at 11:50 13 February 2016

national or ethnic hatred. The Law on Press Freedom provides a further means of curtailing the activities of extremist groups by allowing the banning and closure of publications that advocate racial or ethnic hatred or the violent overthrow of the state.

The press, human rights groups, and, in the case of the Law on Press Freedom, the Russian Federation Committee on the Press have repeatedly called for the enforcement of these laws. Yet federal and municipal authorities have displayed a pattern of disinterest and general disinclination to act. Communists and nationalists in the Supreme Soviet before 1993 and in the Duma and Federation Council since then have generally opposed proposals to toughen laws against extremism, fearful that they themselves might become the victims of a stepped-up government effort to restrict extremism.

Orthodox symbology has been increasingly prominent at RNE meetings, and Orthodox priests have been among the invited guests at RNE conferences.

Yeltsin and his advisers have been only intermittently concerned about the activities of extremist groups. This general pattern appears to have been due in part to political conditions and changing perceptions of the threat posed by political extremism and partly to Yeltsin's lapses of attention and leadership. Even when the president appeared to address the problem of extremist groups, the legislature or the bureaucracy blocked implementation. In addition to its reluctance to endorse tougher legislation aimed at controlling extremism, the communist and nationalist majority in the Duma dramatically indicated its readiness to defend the more extremist groups by including Barkashov and others in the general political amnesty granted to those imprisoned after the October 1993 uprising.

The federal and municipal bureaucracies have generally ignored presidential campaigns against extremist activity. To what degree this reflects political timidity, bureaucratic inefficiency, political sympathy with militant nationalism, or some combination of all these factors is not entirely clear.

The role of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in this pattern is especially questionable. In several regions and localities, as noted above, local RNE organizations have been permitted to act as *druzhinniki* with the tacit approval of local MVD departments. The RNE's repeated claims that it acts as a "strategic" reserve of the MVD and that present and former members of the MVD can be found among its membership have also generally gone unchallenged. MVD officials have admitted that RNE sympathizers can be found among officers in the MVD.[32] A further indication of common MVD and RNE political values and outlook is the parallel harassment and beating campaigns against ethnic minorities.[33]

In several cases RNE military–patriotic clubs have benefited from the support of local authorities or regional military units.[34] At RNE training camps in Stavropol and Krasnodar krais, officers from MVD military units reportedly provide small-arms training to RNE recruits.[35] Further indication that positive attitudes toward the RNE and its activities exist within some quarters of the Russian military emerged at a December 1997 conference on military reform sponsored by the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. A participant from the Russian Military Academy singled out the RNE as an organization with much to contribute to the rebuilding of the Russian military in the years ahead.[36]

The Yeltsin government's first substantial effort to act against extremist organizations occurred after the events of October 1993. During the parliamentary uprising, RNE militants had been defending the parliament and attacked the Ostankino Broadcast Center. Immediately after the rebel's surrender and the restoration of order in Moscow, the Yeltsin government issued an arrest warrant for Barkashov. Along with several other parties associated with the opposition movement, the RNE was banned in accordance with Presidential Edict 1400, issued on October 4, 1993, at the height of the crisis. This crackdown was reversed by the amnesty declared by the new Duma the following February. Not only were Barkashov and other leaders of the October opposition released, but virtually all the banned parties were allowed to reregister. Many newspapers closed by the same decree were also allowed to resume publication.

In the spring of 1995, Yeltsin appeared prepared to launch a stepped-up effort aimed at curtailing the activities of extremist groups. In March, Presidential Decree 310, "Measures Designed to Ensure the Coordinated Action of Organs of State Power in the Struggle Against Manifestations of Fascism and Other Forms of Political Extremism in the Russian Federation," was issued with deliberate fanfare.[37] Conceding that the activities and influence of Russian extremist groups and illegal paramilitary formations were growing in scale and scope, the presidential decree called upon the federal prosecutor to step up efforts aimed at "banning the creation and activity of associations whose objectives and actions are directed at . . . creating armed formations, or inciting

Downloaded by [Orta Dogu Teknik Universitesi] at 11:50 13 February 2016

social, racial, national or religious discord." The directive further instructed regional and municipal governments to refuse permits for meetings, rallies, demonstrations, and processions by public associations or organizers, "if in their earlier public actions . . . appeals were made for forcible changes in the constitutional system or for the inciting of social, racial, national, or religious discord, or the ideas of violence and war were propagandized."[38] Like many Yeltsin decrees, the directive appeared to have a negligible impact in altering the pre-existing pattern of behavior of the state bureaucracy.

Only one conviction under Article 74 of the Criminal Code was registered by 1997. In April 1997 two Jewish veterans filed suit against the avowed Moscow fascist Viktor Korchagin because of an anti-Semitic pamphlet. Aside from this case and a few other inconclusive investigations, no signs of a concerted governmental effort to curtail the activities of extremist groups were in evidence until the fall of 1997.

Significantly, in the Korchagin case, the Federal Prosecutor's Office argued against convicting Korchagin, claiming that a guilty verdict "would spur an infinite number of cases" and "will be certain to lead to greater hostility toward Jews on the part of the people who have been robbed."[39] Korchagin's conviction was promptly overturned by an amnesty associated with the fiftieth anniversary of the victory over fascism. In the three years after the promulgation of Decree 310, RNE activities grew in scope, scale, and visibility, membership more than doubled, and some local and regional authorities began overtly to indulge and support local RNE organizations.

In October 1997, Yeltsin again took visible steps to curb extremism. On October 27, his office announced the formation of a special presidential commission to investigate extremist groups. The commission was chaired by Sergei Stepashin, then minister of justice. Other members included Minister of the Internal Affairs Anatolii Kulikov (who was replaced in this post by Stepashin in early 1998), Federal Security Service director Nikolai Kovalev, Communist Duma deputy and author of the controversial Law on State Religion Vladimir Zorkaltev, and Evgenii Savostianov, deputy head of the president's administration and former chief of the Moscow branch of the Federal Security Service.[40] In outlining the commission's mandate, Stepashin noted that it was generally to examine the activities of fascist and other extremist groups in the Russian Federation and to make recommendations regarding curbing or controlling their activities. At the commission's second session in February 1998, Stepashin confirmed that the RNE was under investigation, but suggested that the greater threat was posed by Islamic extremist groups. Implying that the investigative work of the commission would be drawn out, Stepashin announced that it intended to examine the activities of 60,000 public organizations and 5,000 political parties before recommending the initiation of court action against groups deemed extremist.[41]

Stepashin's description of the commission's work schedule suggests that this latest attempt to control the activities of extremist groups is unlikely to depart from the earlier pattern of benign neglect. The RNE did suffer a rebuke in December 1997 when the Ministry of Justice refused to register it as an all-Russian public association on the grounds that the organization had failed to observe the correct registration procedures. The ministry's decision did not affect the twenty-nine regional branches classified as regional organizations, and RNE officials claimed that its activities would not be affected by the ruling. Subsequent reports in the Russian press have suggested that RNE activities have continued largely unhindered.[42]

No signs of a concerted governmental effort to curtail the activities of extremist groups were in evidence until the fall of 1997.

In July 1998, the Yeltsin administration made a new effort to crack down on militant nationalist organizations. The Human Rights Commission attached to the Office of the President issued a statement warning of: "a new and dangerous tendency of regional authorities to legalize the activities of extremist organizations under the pretext of bolstering law and order and carrying out the patriotic education of youth."[43]

The reference clearly applied to the relationship of authorities in a growing number of regions with the RNE. Simultaneously with this warning, Yeltsin's office submitted a new draft law to the Duma banning the use of fascist symbols and making it a crime to distribute fascist propaganda.[44] The prospect for the adoption of this new law appeared no greater than that of similar legislation proposed by Yeltsin in 1993 and again in 1995.

Yeltsin's latest initiative may in fact result from a belated recognition by the president or his advisers of the dangers inherent in a growing cooperation between extremist paramilitary groups and local authorities. By failing to act with greater determination to curb extremist organizations, Yeltsin and his government have al-

Downloaded by [Orta Dogu Teknik Universitesi] at 11:50 13 February 2016

lowed fascist political ideas to acquire increasing legitimacy and influence in domestic politics. Whether or not the extremist ideology of the RNE and similar groups comes to occupy a more central place in Russian politics depends on broader conditions in Russia. A far more immediate threat to Russian democracy is posed by the vigilantism manifested in the collaboration between local authorities and the RNE. A regime that indulges the growth of vigilantism both signals its own political weakness and, even more seriously, actively undermines the development of the rule of law essential to the building of a stable democratic system in Russia. The fate of the RNE will be an important test of whether the Yeltsin government is willing and able to rein in militant extremism and the increasing vigilantism that has presented a growing threat to Russia's frail democracy.

Notes

1. *Report of the President's Commission on Human Rights 1996* (Moscow: 1996).

2. *Moscow News* (July 9–15, 1998), p. 5.

3. Aleksandr Barkashov, *Azbuka russkogo natsionalista* (Code of Russian Nationalists) (Moscow: Slovo-1, 1994).

4. Ibid., p. 27.

5. Ibid., p. 100.

6. Ibid., p. 101.

7. Ibid., p. 99.

8. Ibid., pp. 32–35.

9. *Russkii stiag* (October 1995), p. 7.

10. Ibid.

11. *Zavtra* (March 1994), p. 2. Warpurgis Night—the eve of May Day, when witches are believed to take flight.

12. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (April 4, 1998), p.4.

13. *Russkii stiag* (October 1995), pp. 4–5.

14. Barkashov, *Azbuka*, pp. 38–39; also, *Russkii stiag* (October 1995), pp. 4–5.

15. *St. Petersburg Press*, no. 138 (1995), p. 3.

16. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (July 7, 1998), p. 7.

17. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (April 4, 1998).

18. *Russkii stiag* (October 1995), p. 1.

19. *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (October 14, 1997), p. 2.

20. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (April 28, 1998), p. 2.

21. *Guardian* (May 29, 1996).

22. *Moscow News* (July 9–15, 1998), p. 5.

23. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (October 18, 1997), p. 1.

24. Rod Usher, "The New Russian Nazis," *Time* (European ed.) (June 9, 1997).

25. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (September 9, 1998), p. 3.

26. *Nezavismaia gazeta* (December 17, 1997), p. 5.

27. On the situation in Orel, see the testimony of Dr. Leonid Stonov, president of the American Association of Russian Jews, before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights, Committee on International Relations, United States House of Representatives, February 27, 1996.

28. *Express-Chronicle* [Moscow] (October 10, 1997).

29. Ibid.

30. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (July 9, 1998), p. 4.

31. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (August 29, 1997), p. 5.

32. *Moscow Times* (December 12, 1994).

33. *Izvestiia* (May 28, 1998), p. 2.

34. Usher, "The New Russian Nazis."

35. *Moscow News* (July 9–15, 1998), p. 5.

36. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (April 4, 1998).

37. "Measures Designed to Ensure the Coordinated Action of Organs of State Power in the Struggle Against Manifestations of Fascism and Other Forms of Political Extremism in the Russian Federation," Decree 310, March 23, 1995.

38. "Yeltsin Decrees Crackdown on Fascism in Russia," *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 47, no. 13 (1995): 5.

39. "Moscow City Court Convicts Fascist with Last Bit of Strength," *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 47, no. 17 (1995): 14–15.

40. *Moscow Times* (November 13, 1997).

41. *Moscow Times* (February 12, 1998).

42. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (September 4, 1998), p. 4; (July 1, 1998), p. 3.

43. Cited in Yuliya Polyakova, "We Won't Go to Any Courts," *Moscow News* (August 6–12, 1998), p. 10.

44. Ibid.

To order reprints, call 1-800-352-2210;
outside the United States, call 717-632-3535.

Downloaded by [Orta Dogu Teknik Universitesi] at 11:50 13 February 2016